1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1964
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CHILDREN AND THEIR PROPERTY

Parents have no scruples about appropriating anything a child may have, or about wasting it carelessly at the same time that they admit the child's ownership of the property. This is in marked contrast to the rigidly scrupulous attitudes of some other nonliterate peoples such as certain American Indian tribes. Repeatedly I gave children small gifts, ranging from candy to a tin container, only to see these gifts in the hands of an adult a few minutes later, while the child stood by without source of redress. One of the major difficulties in using free-play techniques was that adults could not be kept from joining the children and appropriating the toys. As young people begin producing or acquiring property of greater value in adult eyes, this situation becomes more acute. (See Chapter 6.) A quarrel between two boys over a bow illustrates several aspects of this situation.

Pukdang, a boy of about fourteen, gave his bow to an uncle, who promised to mend it for him. When it was mended, the uncle handed the bow to his son instead of returning it to his nephew. The son in turn loaned it to a playmate, who broke it beyond repair. When the nephew discovered what had happened he went to the house of the boy who had broken the bow and seized his bow in compensation—a thoroughly adult procedure. The two boys came to blows and soon both were bellowing with rage and pain. Adults took a hand in separating them and suggested various compromises, which the enraged boys both stubbornly refused to accept. Adult relatives became sufficiently excited to begin snatching the bow from each other's hands. At this point two neutral observers rushed in, seized the bow, and broke it into pieces.

Fantan the Interpreter, who was one of the two neutral observers, commented afterward that they would not have dared to break the bow in this fashion if two adults had been quarreling, but instead everyone would have taken sides and tried to settle matters by compromise. Trivial as this incident is, it illustrates not only the helplessness of children in protecting their own property, but also the peculiar harshness toward growing children that manifests itself repeatedly in teasing, ridiculing, frightening, and beating, as well as in a certain contemptuous lighthandedness where their property interests are concerned.

As harshness may take the form of confiscating children's property, so solicitude may manifest itself in giving them gifts. A minor gift of meat in the case of boys at feasts has already been mentioned. The bracelet, the symbol of status, is another gift children receive from

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Also OF5



his belt. Fanemi sent for Manifani, who was noted for his boldness in burying lepers. Because of this specialty he always had in his possession a few odds and ends of mats, pots, water tubes, and such things used by the people he had buried. The following morning Manifani set up a bamboo pole about five and a half feet high. The end of it was split and in the crotch he wedged a piece of the leper's mat. A man who erects such a curse should not chew betel, smoke, or have intercourse with his wife on the preceding night. Manifani was paid one cent for his services, which indicates that financial reward was scarcely the motivation for the acquisition and practice of his particular skill. That evening Fanemi took a smoldering brand, rubbed it against the foot of the bamboo pole, and told the soul of the leper to pursue the thief and give him leprosy. He then left the smoldering brand at the foot of the curse.

The practical result expected from this procedure is that the guilty person will be frightened into returning secretly the stolen object. Out of many cases of this sort I never knew one in which a curse actually served this purpose. In the case of Fanemi this certainly did not happen. The following night his wife called that she had just seen a firefly set out from near the pole. Several people rushed out and tried to follow it, since it was assumed that the firefly was the soul of the leper searching for the guilty person. Fireflies are very numerous, so the people were soon confused and gave up their attempt to follow it.

Presumably no person except the one who puts up a curse may take it down. In theory even the owner of a garden or a palm should not harvest products until the proper person removes the curse. Actually the pole usually topples over of its own accord and is forgotten or disregarded.

Should a person develop any of the diseases for which there are curses, there is surprisingly little interest in trying to connect the illness and a specific theft. Correlatively, there is in the culture no concept of cure through confession. Repeatedly I brought up this question in relation to particular individuals only to have informants shrug off the question with a casual admission that possibly they were suffering from some curse against theft, but never have I seen curses included in divinations used to determine the sources of illness. An illness is not a source of shame, and it will be recalled that shame, not a sense of guilt, is the dominant emotion in Admiralty life.

This procedure all goes to indicate the economic and essentially impersonal quality of curses. Also, although curses are in fairly common use and are of many varieties, they are probably no more numerous

II:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OFS Alor OFS



thus hardhearted, practical devices for safeguarding property. Coconut trees are banded with sharp, downward-projecting bamboo collars which require considerable time and effort to take off. They are purely mechanical guards intended to delay a thief long enough so that the owner will have a chance to discover him.

Ripening crops, particularly those in more remote fields, are guarded by the owner himself, who will not hesitate to shoot night marauders. Many houses have a trap door at the head of the entrance ladder, which can be closed at night. Casual and unintentional entrance into a deserted house is discouraged by a lacework of green branches, which serves as a sort of "no trespass" sign. This prevents an intruder from pleading innocence should he be seen entering a house. All these very practical protections, which are used just as frequently as the supernatural ones, suggest that the Atimelangers does not rely to any great extent on supernaturalism for protection or vengeance against human beings. This does not mean that supernatural beings cannot protect or harm a human, but that human beings do not employ supernaturalism against one another to the extent that peoples in some other areas do. To be efficacious a system of automatically functioning curses would require a population whose emotions were weighted more on the side of guilt than of shame. That curses are so casually treated bears once more on the point previously made that there is no very marked internalization of moral strictures. That curses are so impersonal causes one to suspect that the negative aspects of personal relationships may be as casual and shallow as the positive ones have been diagnosed as being. In the overgeneralized phraseology sometimes used one might say that modal personality in Atimelang does not have a paranoid trend.

In this connection also, people's relationships to a whole variety of evil spirits (*kari, lolbo*), wealth-bringing spirits (*nawa*), and familiar spirits (*dimang*) are in many instances casual and expedient. Every individual has one or more of these spirits whom he should placate. With the exception of a few specialists, like seers and prophets of the type described in Kilpatrick's and Mahrholz's autobiographies, people ignore supernatural relationships until some misfortune occurs or some service is required. For instance, the village guardian spirit (*alowai*) of Atimelang had had no carvings and sacrifices made for it in about sixteen years. In 1938 two others of the Five Villages made the proper sacrifices. This, combined with my obvious interest, finally led the Atimelangers to perform the ritual that theoretically should be performed every year or two. Similarly, men will completely ignore for many years the supernatural beings they have inherited from their parents until some mishap

§12 hats already hanging by ropes from their shoe-cropped heads. Large field knives were thrust into their cast belts. They were off to the day's work in the gardens, followed by a raging chorus of infants protesting as violently as they knew how at being left behind. A little later the men came down, shivering and stretching, and then were off to their day's work—the harnessing and dressing necessary to maintain the prestige finance system which was their honourable prerogative. There were some men, of course, who joined their wives in field work or who spent the day caring for infants till too small to toddle about alone, but these men were home figures, essentially the satellites of the feminine and comparable to Malinowski only as a day labourer is comparable to the gentleman from New York. The only difference was that in distributing the two sexes lived, dressed and ate alike; a comparison which would hardly be made between the gentleman from New York and a day labourer.

§4.2 This early morning scene set the picture of
§4.21 Alonso life. Women were responsible for sub-
sistence, men for finance. Theory gave each sex its just rewards. All vegetable foods belonged to the women, all commodities to the men. The ownership of land by the women held regardless of whether the field on which it was grown was hers or her husband's and how much labor the men might have contributed to its production. Conversely, the pig fattening in the pen under the house belonged to the man to dispose of as he saw fit, no matter how large a share of the feeding a woman might have done or whether it had been procured by her in the first place. This brings out the point that men and women were possessed of each others' skills but that their rewards and ownerships were divided. The theoretical picture gives the impression of mutual dependence, but in actuality this was not necessarily so. In fact there were several cases of men who lived alone quite comfortably and of women who did the same and were even able to skirt the edges of the male financial game. There was plenty of hostility between the sexes but never in terms of accomplishments. In fact one said admiringly of a man gifted in household tasks, "He is a woman man," or vice versa when a woman showed skill in financial manipulations. It seemed to me that, despite frequent and violent quarrels between men and women, there was basically a greater respect between them than is the case in our own society.

§13 However, the relationship between the two sexes is an odds. The chief point is the division of properties, with the subsistence goods belonging to women and the money to men. Such a

Cp. 994 A]